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Kommersant Plus Interview

1. The U.S. is a constant partner for Moldova in many aspects. What is the view of the American administration regarding this partnership and what is the prospective for our bilateral relations for the near future?

The U.S. values its strong partnership with Moldova, and we would like this relationship to grow and strengthen. Moldova now lies at the new border of the EU. As Moldova strives to be included within the EU's borders it will come under increasing scrutiny about how well it is succeeding in reducing poverty, opening its markets to investment, and progressing in its transition to a transparent, democratic and pluralistic society.

2. For a long period of time, official Chisinau has tried to enlarge the list of participants in the TN negotiations, insisting that the U.S. and EU should be part of them. But the negotiations in the new format are now blocked. In your view, what is the reason for this inertia?

Unfortunately, some of the parties to the talks have taken an unconstructive line by deferring further discussions until certain preconditions are met. Our position is that talks should be resumed promptly without any preconditions.

3. Lately the U.S. is actively involved in "unfreezing" frozen conflicts in Eurasia. Are there any successes in this respect and what are the difficulties?

In the Transnistrian conflict, there have been some elements of success. One is the deployment of the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) in December 2005. Another success has been the registration of almost all Transnistrian businesses to a fair and recognized customs regime; this has legitimized their exports.

4. How do you see the future development of the situation around the TN conflict? Can this problem be solved, so that the interests of all the sides, directly or indirectly involved in the conflict, and the geo-strategic interests of the big states are taken into account?

I fail to understand why it would be in the interest of a "big state" to want the breakup of Moldova. The borders of what is now the Republic of Moldova were established long before the breakup of the Soviet Union and there is no reason for those borders to change. I understand the interest of some in preserving the status quo has meant that reaching a settlement is complicated and takes time. Nonetheless, the United States is optimistic about an eventual resolution to the Transnistrian conflict based on the

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independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Moldova. It's hard to imagine that in the 21st century people would support, even tacitly, the prolongation of these frozen conflicts.

5. **The U.S. and Russia, when solving many problems called "the challenges of the millennium," act as partners and even allies on the international arena. This was the description that President George Bush gave to this relationship during his last press conference. But there are also big disagreements between these two countries, particularly in the application of the "Kosovo precedent" in the process of solving internal territorial disputes, such as Transnistria. Is there any possibility to overcome the disagreements and take into account the interests of the sides?**

We are always looking for solutions to actual and potential conflicts. Indeed, the U.S. and Russia have many interests in common on which we cooperate and will continue to cooperate. One of these areas is anti-terrorism. Since September 11, 2001, we have cooperated in numerous initiatives in this area, combining our resources to fight this common threat.

One specific example is the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, which Presidents Bush and Putin both signed last August. The Initiative calls on states to expand and accelerate their capacity to combat nuclear terrorism together. And we are also working together to find ways to stop nations, such as North Korea and Iran, from creating nuclear weapons. The recent progress made in negotiating a settlement with North Korea proves that these collaborative efforts are bearing fruit.

On the subject of Kosovo, we cannot support the argument that Kosovo can serve as a precedent for the frozen conflicts. Kosovo is a special case for several reasons. For one, in Kosovo crimes were carried out by Milosevic's government—by the central government—against a portion of the population with the goal of ethnic cleansing. These crimes were condemned by the international community. Because of ethnic cleansing, large sections of the population were displaced during the war there. For another, there is direct involvement by the United Nations in Kosovo. The U.N. unanimously adopted UNSC resolution 1244, setting up self-government in the Kosovo region and establishing the political process for determining Kosovo's future status. Recently, talks were held to discuss a final settlement for Kosovo, and it is clear that the EU will have a larger role now in leading Kosovo forward. Circumstances in Transnistria are not at all like Kosovo's, and therefore we reject these arguments given by special interest groups in Transnistria and in other countries for tearing away Transnistria from Moldova.

6. **One of the biggest problems between Moscow and Washington is the renewed arms race in the sphere of creating the new anti-missile defense systems. The**

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U.S. announced that new anti-missile systems will be built in the direct vicinity of the western borders of Russia. Public reactions in Poland and the Czech Republic are not unanimous – the governments support the idea of the involvement of these countries in solving this big problem, while the majority of the population is against it. What is the probability of the involvement of Moldova, as a devoted ally of the U.S., in this project?

The notion that the anti-missile defense systems proposed to be located in Poland and the Czech Republic are somehow directed against Russia is wrong. We have not asked Moldova to be involved in the anti-missile program. No request has been made of the Moldovan Government to host any part or aspect of the anti-missile program and we have no plans to involve Moldova in any type of U.S. anti-missile defense system in Europe.

I reject the idea that the anti-missile program in any way will launch "a new arms race." This system is designed to counter threats from the Middle East, a goal that we share with our European Allies and friends as well as the entire international community. We have consulted at length and repeatedly during the past several years with Russian government officials on our missile defense plans and have been completely transparent with them throughout. The truth is that this system is not physically capable of threatening Russia. The proposed system poses absolutely no threat to Russia whatsoever. And we trust that with more and better information – rather than disinformation – about the project, Czech and Polish citizens will come to see that the program guarantees their security, too.

7. A scandal that just started in Europe is linked to the CIA activity in this part of the world. It is related to the CIA prisons in some of the former socialist countries, aimed at detaining military detainees from Afghanistan and Iraq without investigations or court decisions. Aren't you afraid that such a nervous reaction on behalf of some EU countries can considerably spoil the image of America in the eastern European countries, which just entered the EU, and due to the circumstances are believed to be the U.S. allies or even satellites?

The so-called "scandal" has not just started in Europe. Concerns about possible CIA activities have been raised for well more than one year. I must say that I will not comment on issues regarding CIA operations. However, please allow me to describe this tool that is called rendition. It is the process of transporting suspected criminals or terrorists from one country to another. This is a vital tool in combating international narcotics trafficking as well as transnational terrorism. Its use is not unique to the United States or to the current U.S. administration. Renditions are designed to take terrorists out of action, and to save lives. The United States has respected, and will continue to respect, the sovereignty of other countries. We have demonstrated that we are ready to work with EU and other

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countries to improve the tools, and find better tools, that we all use to combat terrorism.

8. Recently a group of senators initiated, in the supreme chamber of the U.S. Congress, a discussion regarding starting up the procedure of adherence to NATO of Ukraine and Georgia. Isn't Washington afraid that this might lead to the territorial splitting of Ukraine, and that Georgia might enter NATO without its northern provinces – Abkhazia and South Ossetia?

At the Riga Summit of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in November 2006, the Heads of State and Government of the member countries of NATO issued a declaration reaffirming that NATO's door remains open to new members and that all European democratic countries may be considered for a Membership Action Plan (MAP) or admission. This is subject to the decision of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) at each stage of the process and based on the performance of these countries towards meeting the objectives of the North Atlantic Treaty. Future membership in the alliance will be contingent upon implementation of democratic, defense, and economic reform, willingness and ability to meet the responsibilities of membership in NATO and a clear expression of national intent to join the alliance. Developing closer ties with NATO does not require or even imply any eventual territorial divisions.

9. What is Moldova's prospective to enter NATO? Moldova's authorities are not only loyal to this idea, but also try to protect any projects (with NATO) from protests. In comparison with Ukraine, where American participants in the military exercises were pushed away from Crimea by a crowd of protesters, such exercises went smoothly in Moldova and had a pretty good coverage in the press.

Moldova has not requested to join NATO. In fact, Moldova's constitution states that Moldova is a neutral nation. Moldova has been a member of the NATO Partnership for Peace (PFP) program since 1994 and participates with NATO in seminars, conferences and exercises. Additionally, Moldova successfully hosted its first NATO PFP exercise-- Cooperative Longbow and Cooperative Lancer in September 2006. The exercise was conducted in such a manner as to promote military cooperation and openness, and this approach contributed greatly to its success. Among the many nations participating in the exercise, I would note that Belarus and neutral nations such as Switzerland and Austria contributed military personnel to the exercise. Additionally, in the spirit of openness, Russian and Transnistrian representatives from the Joint Military Command (JMC) in the security zone in Moldova visited the exercise.

Finally, Moldova requested an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with NATO in 2006 to facilitate reforms in defense with the assistance

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of the NATO partners. The IPAP is a valuable tool to help Moldova modernize its military and make it more interoperable with NATO. This in turn allows Moldova to participate more fully with NATO in a variety of operations, such as peace support operations, to the extent that Moldova desires, without any expectation of NATO membership.

10. How does the American administration view the European integration of Moldova?

We support Moldova's efforts to embrace Euro-Atlantic ideals and practices in combating corruption, ensuring freedom of speech, assembly and religion, and creating a free and open market economy. Reforms and implementation of the EU-Moldova Action Plan are the logical means to these ends.

While we strongly endorse Moldova's goal of joining the EU, I'd like to add that joining the European Union shouldn't necessarily be Moldova's only goal. The goal, I believe, should be to make the changes needed to make Moldova's economy, legal system, human rights situation and living standards so good that Moldova becomes a very attractive potential new EU member. Not all countries in Western Europe are members of the European Union. Switzerland and Norway are two great examples of very well developed European countries which are not within the EU. So Moldova should find its own way to make the kind of progress needed to make Moldova a country with the very highest standards for all of its citizens.

11. In the sphere of economic relations with the West, Moldova has been trying to obtain an asymmetrical trade regime, but things haven't gone farther than the promises. How does the U.S. view the idea of external trade preferences for Moldova?

We support EU efforts to include Moldovan products in a preferential trade regime. However, it is up to Moldova to meet the higher standards – such as health, safety and other standards – that must be met in order to qualify. If Moldova is genuinely interested in market diversification for its exports – wine, for example – then real, sustainable efforts must be made to meet these requirements.

12. During the next three years, Moldova will receive big credits from IMF, in the framework of the EU neighborhood program, and the Millennium Challenge, which is administered by your country. For us \$1.5 billion is a huge sum that equals two annual budgets. Is this generosity a sign that economic reforms are going well in our country and that the communist government in Moldova has progressed in democratic development and human rights?

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I can only speak to the U.S. programs of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). Because there has been progress in political and economic reforms, in December 2006 the U.S. Government signed an MCC Threshold Program with Moldova, worth \$24.7 million in technical assistance. The Threshold Program is in fact designed to strengthen Moldova's efforts to curb corruption—a very real problem that impedes investment and economic and political development. Moldova also has an opportunity to receive MCC Compact assistance, potentially many more millions of dollars, if it continues on the path of reforms and if it develops a good, well-structured proposal.

13. Is the U.S. Department of State going to simplify the visa regime for Moldovans? How can you comment on this news, which had a resonance in the Moldovan society, especially for that part of it which can afford regular travels abroad and over the ocean?

Yes, the United States very much would like to liberalize the visa regime with Moldova. We issue a wide variety of different visas and bases visa conditions and fees on "reciprocity," providing to the degree possible the same conditions and fees another country sets for a United States citizen for a similar-type visa. In my February 12 meeting with FM Stratan, I noted that Moldova had removed the visa requirement for American citizens visiting Moldova as of January 1, 2007. Because of that step, we offered to consult with the Moldovan Government to see whether it would be appropriate to increase the length of validity for certain categories of visa applicants.

Thanks to the growing commercial and educational ties between the United States and Moldova, the U.S. Embassy raised the issue of lengthening the period of validity for many categories of visas. We are open to the possibility of having a visa regime for Moldovan citizens that is as liberal as any we have with the 12 EU member states which do not benefit from the Visa Waiver Program. We hope to conclude these negotiations in the near future.

14. A few questions about career, family, hobbies. How do you describe your stay in Moldova not as a diplomat, but as a person who is learning something new?

I joined the Foreign Service in 1980. I am married to Sara Powelson Kirby and we have two daughters – Katherine and Elizabeth. Our daughters currently are university students, but they will be spending part of the summer with us here in Chisinau. Sara and I play tennis. I still enjoy playing soccer (I am a goal keeper).

I have been in Moldova about seven months now and I must say that I am really enjoying my time here. I can tell you that it is an honor to serve

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my country. I've spent some time exploring Chisinau and have found many things to enjoy here, such as your restaurants, concert halls, galleries, and parks. I have also been lucky to have had many chances to travel outside of Chisinau. In my short time here I've visited Balti, Sorocca, Donduseni, Calerasi, Ialoveni, Cahul, Comrat, Ceadir-Lunga, Basarabasca and Giurgiulesti so far. As a result, I feel I have been able to see some of your country. Your countryside is beautiful and I am told that it's really lovely in the spring, so I'm looking forward to that.

Another thing I'm really enjoying here is your wine. By this point, I have a few favorites. I've even managed to do some wine tasting, both at wineries and in my own home. I don't think it is poison!

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